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THE GOOD HUNTER AND THE IROQUOIS MEDICINE.

IN the "Jesuit Relation" for 1636 is an account of the Huron feasts, and one of these lacks clearness. "The *Ononhara* is for the madmen. . . . They refer the origin to a certain interview of the wolves and the owl, where this nocturnal animal predicted to them the coming of *Ontarraoura*, that is, a beast which approaches the lion by the tail (retire au Lyon par la queue), which *Ontarraoura* revived, they say, a certain good hunter, a great friend of the wolves, in the midst of a good feast; whence they conclude that the feasts are capable of healing the sick, since they even give life to the dead."

It was easy for me to see that this beast was the panther, an animal little known to the Hurons or the missionaries, but which has been widely named the mountain lion. The Onondagas still call it *Sken-tah-ses-go'-nah*, "Long Tail." Its nocturnal habits, and even its cry, often mistaken for that of the panther, might have associated the owl with it in tales of the forest, but what was the story of the good hunter? In answering this question I have nothing very original to offer, but will transcribe two accounts very nearly as I find them. In neither of these does the panther figure, but the death of the good hunter, the gathering of birds and beasts, his revival, and the gift of the great medicine, are prominent features. In the lapse of two centuries and a half, and in its relation by another people, it has become slightly changed, but the story is probably essentially that of the ancient Hurons and their kindred.

The oldest version of this may be found in Doty's "History of Livingston County, New York," as it was given long ago by an old Seneca, to Mr. Horsford, their missionary.

"In ancient times a war broke out between two tribes. On the one side the forces were jointly led by a great warrior and a noted hunter. The latter had killed much game for the skins, the remains being left for beasts and birds of prey. The battle was going against

his side, and he saw that to save his own life he must quit the field. As he turned, the body of a great tree lay across his path. He came up to it, when a heavy blow felled him. On recovering he found, strangely enough, that he could as easily pass through as over the obstruction. Reaching home, his friends would not talk with him ; indeed they seemed quite unaware of his presence. It now occurred to him that he, too, had been killed, and was present in spirit only, human eyes not seeing him. He returned to the place of conflict, and there, sure enough, lay his mortal part quite dead, and its scalp gone. A pigeon-hawk, flying by, recognized the disembodied hunter, and gratefully offered to restore his scalp ; so, stretching away in its flight to the retiring victors, he plucked it from the bloody pole. The other birds had, meantime, prepared a medicine which soon united the scalp to the head, when bears and wolves gathered around and joined in the dance. The hunter got well and lived many years, his experience strengthening their religious faith, and teaching them how to use the remedies so strangely acquired, which, to this day, are among the most efficacious known to the Indians."

In 1881, Elias Johnson, a Tuscarora chief, published the "Legends, Traditions, and Laws of the Six Nations," in which the story has an ampler form. Of this I will give a summary. The good hunter appears as before, as one noted for kindness and generosity to all, even beasts and birds. Though a hunter, he was considered the protector of these. On one occasion he went out with a war party. The battle was furious, and in the most desperate struggle he was struck down, scalped, and left for dead.

A fox came along when the conflict was over, and recognized this friend of bird and beast lying lifeless on the field. Shocked by the sight, he raised the death lament, and called all the beasts together. Their cries were heard in the forest ; they came by hundreds to the spot and tried to revive their friend. Vain were all their efforts, and he remained lifeless. As they sat down on their haunches to hold a council, they raised their heads, and a dolorous cry rent the air. Then the bear was called to speak, as being the nearest relative and best friend of man. He appealed to each and all for any medicine they had, but though each had his own, none did any good. Again they lifted up their heads and howled a mournful requiem, long continued, and with many varying notes.

This sad lament, wild as the Highland coronach, brought the oriole to the spot. He was told of their sad plight, and in turn went and called a council of the birds. There was a flapping of wings everywhere, and all came, from the eagle to the wren, in response to the call. With beak and with claw they made every effort, but nothing came of it. The hunter was dead, stubbornly dead, and his scalp

was gone. The eagle's head had become white in his long and wise life, and from his lofty eyrie he had looked down, and knew every force of nature and all the events of life. This white-headed sage said that the dead would not revive unless the scalp was restored.

First of all the fox went to seek it. He visited every hen-roost and every bird's-nest, but no scalp did he find. The pigeon-hawk took up the search, but soon returned. She flew so swiftly that no one expected her to see much, for birds have characters as well as men. The white heron flew more slowly, and said he would do better, but he came to a field of luscious wild beans, which tempted him to stop. He fed and slept, and fed again, while the council waited his return in vain. At last the crow took the mission. The warrior who had the scalp knew of the council, but feared nothing when he saw the crow flying near. He was accustomed to that. She saw the scalp stretched to dry in the smoke above his cabin, and after a time carried it off. Great was the rejoicing when she came back successful. At once they put the scalp on the dead man's head, but so dry and warped had it become that it would not fit.

Here was a new trouble. The animals did their best, but could not moisten it, having no patent lubricator. Then the great eagle said that on the high rocks, where he lived, the mountain dew had collected on his back, and perhaps this might serve. He plucked one of his long feathers, dipped it in this dew, and applied it to the scalp. It was at once effectual, and the scalp became moist again. The animals brought other things for the cure. The scalp was placed on the head, to which it closely adhered, and then the hunter revived and recovered his strength. They gave him the compound which had restored him, as the gift of the Great Spirit, and then there was a pattering of feet and a rustle of wings as the council dispersed. The medicine was always cherished.

It was used in this way: a wooden goblet is taken to a running stream, and filled by dipping down the stream. When brought back to the house it is placed near the fire, with some tobacco. Then there are prayers while the tobacco is gradually thrown on the fire. The smoke is grateful to the Great Spirit, and with this American incense their prayers arise. Some of my white friends also like it, without this ritual use as yet. The medicine-man then places a piece of skin near the cup, and on this the medicine is laid. He takes up a little of the pulverized compound with a wooden spoon, such as was recently used, and dusts it on the water in three spots * * * in the form of a triangle. This is closely watched. If it spreads over the water and whirls about on the surface, the sick person will recover. If it sinks at once, where it was placed, the sick will die, and nothing can be done. In the one case the medicine is given, in the other all the water is thrown away.

This is not the only medicine, and Mr. Johnson gives another story and use: One day a hunter heard the sweetest music in the woods, but the most thorough search did not reveal its source. Charmed by the sound, he went again and again, but with no better success. Not a note was heard. At last the Great Spirit came to him in a dream, and told him what to do. He was to purify himself before he sought it, and this he at once did. The forest path was taken, the ravishing strain fell upon his ear, and he listened attentively till he could sing every note himself. Then he drew nearer. A tall, green plant stood before him, with long and tapering leaves. This he cut down, but it was immediately healed, and became as before. He did this repeatedly, with the same results, and then knew it as medicine especially good for wounds. Rejoicing in his great discovery, he took part of the plant home, where it was dried and pulverized. Then he touched it to a bad wound which a man had received, and it was healed at once. In this way did the Great Spirit bestow this great medicine upon men, and very grateful were they.

This medicine is used very differently, and Mr. Johnson describes the feast to which it belongs. Once in six months there is a great feast at the hunting season, and these come in the spring and in the fall. On the night of the feast, as soon as it is dark, all concerned assemble in one room. Lights are extinguished, and even the coals are carefully covered. The medicine is placed near these, and tobacco is laid beside it. Then all begin to sing, proclaiming that the crows are coming to the feast, and the other birds and beasts whose brains form part of the first great medicine, the one which originated when they revived the good hunter. At the end of the song their calls are imitated. Thrice during the night prayers are offered, and during these tobacco is thrown on the smothered embers. In these it is asked that all may be protected from harm, and that this medicine may heal injuries of every kind. To preserve due solemnity and prevent interruption the doors are locked when the ceremonies begin. None are allowed to enter or go out, and none to fall asleep. Anything like this would spoil the medicine.

The actual feast begins just before daybreak. The past observances being here described as in the present, the master of ceremonies first takes a deer's head and bites it, imitating the call of a crow. He then passes it to another, who bites it in turn, and imitates some other beast or bird. Thus it goes around. When it begins to be light the master of ceremonies takes a duck's bill and dips it full of the medicine. Some of this he gives to each one present, who puts it into a piece of skin, wrapping it in several covers. This is kept for the next feast, six months later. The panther's skin was preferred for the first cover, when it could be had.

Those who take active part in this feast are all medicine-men, but chiefs may be present, and those who at any time have been cured by the medicine. While these things are going on within the house, the young people are having a merry time outside, and the remnants of the feast are given to them when those inside are done. When this medicine is used the tune heard at its discovery is sung, both at the feast and at its administration. The ceremonies are thought to make it effective. Each medicine-man has a large quantity, which he keeps in a bag. To this he sometimes adds pulverized corn roots or squash vines, if he fears its exhaustion, and when it is given several assemble and sing. Both kinds were deemed especially useful in healing wounds received in war. These were the great medicines; there were others less important.

Mrs. Erminnie A. Smith's account of the origin of the Seneca medicine has some resemblance to this: A hunter is awakened by singing and the sound of a drum. He followed the sound and came to a place apparently inhabited. There a hill of corn had three ears, and a squash vine bore three squashes. The next night he heard the sound again, and a man threatened his life for looking on forbidden things. Others gathered around and said he should not die, but they would impart to him their secret medicine. This was contained in the squashes and corn.

He was led to a spot where many were dancing around a fire. They heated an iron and thrust it through his cheek, and then at once healed it. They burned his leg, and did the same, but all the time they sang the medicine song, which he also learned. As he turned homeward he found that these were not men, as he had supposed, but a great gathering of birds and beasts. It seems in this a variant of the good hunter story.

He had been shown how to prepare the medicine. He was "to take one stalk of corn and dry the cob and pound it very fine, and to take one squash, cut it up and pound that, and they then showed him how much for a dose. He was to take water from a running spring, and always from up the stream, never down." I quote this verbatim in case any one may wish to try so powerful and simple a remedy.

Of course the giving of it varies little. "The people sing over its preparation every time the deer changes his coat, and when it is administered to a patient they sing the medicine song, while they rattle a gourd-shell as accompaniment, and burn tobacco."

Mrs. Smith relates another story, much like that told by David Cusick. An old man applied for hospitality at several lodges in turn, and was repulsed. He found shelter at last, and was kindly treated. Being sick, he desired his hostess to go for certain herbs, which she

prepared as he told her, and he was soon cured. Then he had a fever, and other herbs were brought for his cure. One after another he had all the ailments known to the red man, and recourse to every healing herb. When the cure of all diseases had been taught he went away, and was seen no more, leaving a blessing behind.

David Cusick did not dwell upon the particulars of this visit, but said that the old man taught them much besides medicine, though this was his principal mission.

Among the Onondagas a secret medicine society is called *Ka-noo'-tah*, but there are other names having some reference to these. Captain George, of that nation, used a whistle of bamboo in the annual ceremonial making of the medicine, of which I have a figure. It is eight inches long, and has a lateral hole towards one end. On either side of this is a piece of lead, fastened to the bamboo by winding a string several times around both. By pushing these back and forth the tone can be changed. This is also a feature of the Iroquois flute. As many of the Onondagas have faith in their old remedies, and Captain George had some real medical skill, he held the appointment of physician to them for some years before his death.

As a rule, we depend on what the Indians tell us for what we know of the great medicine or any other. It is rarely the case that a white person is a member of any of the Iroquois medicine societies. Mrs. Harriet Maxwell Converse has been initiated in the Seneca *Na-gu-na-gar-ha*, and gives a favorable account of this. It would hardly be proper to anticipate her description in any way, but she says that devout Christian Senecas are among the active members. Her account does not conflict with those here given, and she has published such notes as thus far seem best. The feasts occur in the fall and spring.

The Jesuits mentioned the drinking of medicine water by the Hurons in 1640, in a ceremonial way. This does not seem to have been customary among them, and the other allusions which I recall are to simple healing beverages of an ordinary kind. Among the Iroquois it was different. The most exact account we have of the Onondaga medicinal water is in the "Relation" of 1670: "They took in their mouth a certain mysterious water, and with great efforts blew it upon the cheeks and temples of the sick man, and he who was as it were the chief of this band ordered them also to throw it upon the hair and head, and even upon the mat where this poor sick man was lying. It was needful that everything should be bedewed, in order to chase the demon of the malady, which was in the ear of this savage. I noticed that they then all drank of the same liquor, and that they took the medicine which ought to cure the sick man."

Bruyas has an allusion to this in his Mohawk lexicon, now two

centuries old. *Arontaton* he first defines "to blow," and then "tirer le fusil et arroser d'eau medicinale;" to fire the gun, and water or sprinkle with medicinal water," thus transferring to this its primitive personal use. The idea may have been that the gun was bewitched. In fact, it is yet supposed that guns are affected by certain mysterious influences aside from any evil intent, but charms and witchcraft still have a prominent place in New York Indian life. In guarding against these the medicine has a recognized power, yet I do not find the Indian more superstitious on the whole than some of his white neighbors.

W. M. Beauchamp.